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ABSTRACT

Place-based education is a relatively new term, but progressive educators have promoted the concept for over 100 years. Place-based education usually includes conventional outdoor education and experiential methodologies as advocated by John Dewey to help students connect with their particular corner of the world. Proponents of place-based education often envision a role for it in achieving local ecological and cultural sustainability. This digest reviews place-based curriculum and instruction, especially as it relates to outdoor and environmental education, and provides examples of K-12 resources and programs. A brief review identifies the purposes of outdoor education, environmental education, and place-based education and the relationships among them, and points out overlapping concepts in the literature: community-oriented schooling, ecological education, bioregional education, ecoliteracy, ecological identity, and pedagogy of place. The essential characteristics of place-based education are that it emerges from the particular attributes of a place, is inherently multidisciplinary and experiential, reflects a philosophy broader than "learn to earn," and connects place with self and community. In contrast to work-oriented goals of schooling, place-based education prepares people to live and work to sustain the places they inhabit and to participate actively in democracy. Thirteen relevant periodicals and books are briefly described. (SV)

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Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction: Outdoor and Environmental Education Approaches

Janice L. Woodhouse and Clifford E. Knapp

Place-based education is a relatively new term, appearing only recently in the education literature. However, progressive educators have promoted the concept for more than 100 years. For example, in *The School and Society*, John Dewey advocated an experiential approach to student learning in the local environment: "Experience [outside the school] has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literary, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it" (1915, p. 91). Place-based education usually includes conventional outdoor education methodologies as advocated by John Dewey to help students connect with their particular corners of the world. Proponents of placebased education often envision a role for it in achieving local ecological and cultural sustainability.[1] This Digest reviews placebased curriculum and instruction, especially as it relates to outdoor and environmental education, and provides examples of K-12 resources and programs.

Outdoor Education, Environmental Education and Place-Based Education: How are They Connected?

The main purpose of *outdoor education* is to provide meaningful contextual experiences—in both natural and constructed environments—that complement and expand classroom instruction, which tends to be dominated by print and electronic media (Knapp, 1996, p. ix). It is a broader term than *environmental education*, which can be described as instruction directed toward developing a citizenry prepared to live well in a place without destroying it (Orr, 1994, p. 14). Environmental education can occur both inside and outside the classroom.

Understanding the relationships among place-based education, outdoor education, and environmental education is worthwhile because each concept has been developed somewhat separately by educators who have produced curriculum materials and instructional practices that could be useful within the other concept areas. Further complicating this potential exchange is the variety of labels that have been applied to each of these approaches. For example, as the field of outdoor education matured, it was labeled school camping, camping education, and eventually, outdoor education. Likewise, place-based education has been referred to as *community-oriented schooling*, *ecological education*, and *bioregional education*.

Paul Theobald refers to *place-conscious* elementary and secondary classrooms in his book, *Teaching The Commons* (1997, pp. 132-159). He advocates using the immediate locale as "the lens for disciplinary engagement in all schools across the country" (p. 137). In a later article, Theobald and Curtiss (2000) describe the field as *community-oriented schooling*.

Smith and Williams (1999) describe this approach as *ecological education*. They write, "The practice of ecological education requires viewing human beings as one part of the natural world and human cultures as an outgrowth of interactions between species and particular places" (p. 3). The authors outline seven principles, two of which directly reflect outdoor education: (1) practical experiences outdoors through the application of an ethic of care, and (2) grounding learning in a sense of place through investigation of surrounding natural and human communities.

Traina and Darley-Hill (1995) extend "locale" to include *bioregional education*, encouraging students and teachers to know their place and to consider the impact of lifestyles on the resources of that bioregion. Similarly, Orr's (1994) call for *ecoliteracy* presents principles for rethinking education that clearly relate place-based education to outdoor education: (1) students should understand the effects of this knowledge on real people and their communities; and (2) learning though direct experiences outside the classroom is as important as the content of particular courses.

Thomashow (1995) writes about the goal of achieving *ecological identity* through the examination of four basic questions: What do I know about the place where I live? Where do things come from? How do I connect to the earth? What is my purpose as a human being? He integrates these questions into activities by incorporating reflective learning in the school, home, community, and the workplace (p. xvii). These questions focus curriculum and instruction on understanding and appreciating students' immediate surroundings.

Haymes (1995) speaks directly to a *pedagogy of place* and addresses issues of race and class as they are made manifest in the construction of urban environments and in the power and politics that emerge from those constructs. His work takes a cultural studies perspective and contributes a much-needed complement to more conventional outdoor/environmental curriculum and instruction.

What are the Essential Characteristics of Place-Based Education?

A survey of the literature on place-based education reveals characteristic patterns to this still-evolving approach that make it distinctive.

- It emerges from the particular attributes of a place. The content is specific to the geography, ecology, sociology, politics, and other dynamics of that place. This fundamental characteristic establishes the foundation of the concept.
- It is inherently multidisciplinary.
- It is inherently experiential. In many programs this includes a participatory action or service learning component; in fact, some advocates insist that action must be a component if ecological and cultural sustainability are to result.
- It is reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than "learn to earn." Economics of place can be an area of study as a curriculum explores local industry and sustainability; however, all curricula and programs are designed for broader objectives.
- It connects place with self and community. Because of the ecological lens through which place-based curricula

[1] "Sustainability" connotes economic and social practices that use, preserve, and restore ecosystems while providing for the basic needs of diverse human populations.

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are envisioned, these connections are pervasive. These curricula include multigenerational and multicultural dimensions as they interface with community resources.

Why is Place-Based Education Important?

Some critics of place-based education believe that the primary goal of schooling should be to prepare students to work and function in a highly technological and consumer-oriented society. In contrast, place-based educators believe that education should prepare people to live and work to sustain the cultural and ecological integrity of the places they inhabit. To do this, people must have knowledge of ecological patterns, systems of causation, and the long-term effects of human actions on those patterns (Orr, 1994). One of the most compelling reasons to adopt place-based education is to provide students with the knowledge and experiences needed to actively participate in the democratic process.

What Are Some Sources of Place-Based Curriculum?

Space limitations in this Digest preclude extensive lists and descriptions of place-based programs. However, the references below will direct the reader to many of them.

Periodicals. For descriptions of exemplary curricula, see the resources and reviews sections of back and future issues of:

The Active Learner: A Foxfire Journal for Teachers. The Foxfire Fund, Inc. P. O. Box 541, Mountain City, GA 30562-0541. 706-746-5828.

Clearing: Environmental Education in the Pacific Northwest. Creative Educational Networks/EE Project, P. O. Box 82954, Portland, OR 97282. 503-657-6958 x 2638.

Green Teacher: Education For Planet Earth. 95 Robert Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2K5. 416-960-1244.

Orion Afield: Working for Nature and Community. The Orion Society, 195 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230. 413-528-4422. (Especially "In Pursuit of a Bioregional Curriculum," Spring, 1999, Vol. 3, No. 2).

Taproot: A Publication of The Coalition for Education in the Outdoors. P. O. Box 2000, Park Center, Cortland, NY 13045. 605-753-4971.

Books. In addition to books included in the reference list, see the following:

Bowers, C. A. (1995). *Educating for an ecologically sustainable culture.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Describes three curriculum models of community and environmental renewal and profiles the Foxfire Curriculum, the Common Roots Program, and the Ecoliteracy Project. Bowers notes that the three programs represent very different approaches, but they all share the common characteristic of having evolved outside schools of education (p. 184).

Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of indigenous education.* Durango, CO: Kivaki Press. Describes Indigenous teaching and learning tied to place. Written by a Tewa Indian specializing in environmental education and multicultural curriculum/program development in science, social science, and the arts. These concepts and principles are equally adaptable to mainstream institutions.

Haas, T., & Nachtigal, P. (1998). *Place value: An educator's guide to good literature on rural lifeways, environments, and purposes of education.* Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. Chapter subtitles describe the book's scope: education for living well ecologically, politically, economically, spiritually, and in community. Extensive annotated bibliographies for each aspect of place-based education are included.

Hart, R. A. (1999). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of including young citizens in community development and environmental care.* London: Earthscan Publications Ltd. Outlines a theory and practice leading to sustainable "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 5). Hart's examples of place-based curricula are provided through several case studies from all over the world.

Kriesberg, D. A. (1999). *A sense of place: Teaching children about the environment with picture books.* Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press. Highlights integration of the arts with place, providing teachers with picture book resources and activities for place-based teaching.

Smith, G. A., & Williams, D. R. (Eds.) (1999). *Ecological education in action: On weaving education, culture, and the environment.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Kiefer and Demple describe a strategy for building an ecologically sustainable way of learning in the program, "Common Roots." They conclude, "in creating a context for local curriculum, we have seen the power of unifying the curriculum through the unique story of each community" (p. 43).

Sobel, D. (1993). *Children's special places: Exploring the role of forts, dens, and bush houses in middle childhood.* Tucson, AZ: Zephyr Press. Offers several case studies in Chapter 5: "Making a Place in The Curriculum" and demonstrates the importance of childhood experiences around the home and community.

The Orion Society (1998). *Stories in the land: A place-based environmental education anthology.* Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society. John Elder describes four fundamental themes illustrated by the programs described: attentiveness to students' home landscapes, the convergence of natural sciences and the arts, time spent outdoors, and exploring cultural aspects of the community (pp. 13-14). The authors of this anthology provide examples of place-based curricula.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Directions

Place-based education represents a recent trend in the broad field of outdoor education. It recaptures the ancient idea of "listening to the land" and living and learning in harmony with the earth and with each other. As society becomes increasingly urbanized and technologized, educators must continue to adopt and adapt more of the goals, theory, and practice of place-based education.

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